

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/belarus-more-and-more-freelance-18-11-2014,47021.html>

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Europe/Ex-USSR - Belarus

More persecution

## More and more freelance journalists are being prosecuted

18 November 2014

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Reporters Without Borders condemns a mounting campaign of harassment and intimidation of Belarusian journalists working for foreign media. It consists of raids, warnings and fines and could escalate still further in the run-up to next year's presidential election.

[Since 2009](#), journalists working for media based abroad are supposed to be accredited with the foreign ministry but the ministry systematically rejects all accreditation requests, forcing them to work illegally and exposing them to prosecution on a charge of "illegal production of media content" under article 22.9 of the Code of Administrative Offences.

In one of the later cases, the police notified **Ales Zaleuski** on 13 November that he [would be prosecuted](#) for doing a report on corruption for Warsaw-based *Belsat TV*. He was already fined 4.5 million roubles (330 euros) last May on a similar charge.

Two policemen went to **Andrey Myaleshka's** home in the western city of Hrodna on 13 November to question him about an interview he did in October for *Radio Racyja*, a radio station based in Poland. They told him he would be charged with producing media content illegally because he had worked without accreditation.

This will be Myaleshka's third prosecution in the past six months. He was fined 4.5 million roubles (330 euros) in June and 5.25 million roubles (395 euros) in October on similar charges.

He told Reporters Without Borders that nothing would stop him from working. "But the judicial proceedings, appeals and paper work take up a lot of time and are distracting, while many sources now think twice about talking to me," he said, adding that he was under close surveillance.

**Ales Burakou**, a journalist based in the eastern city of Mahilyou, was [questioned by tax inspectors](#) on 13 November about his earnings from foreign sources from 2010 to 2013. He called it a new form of harassment, saying he already filed all the required tax declarations. He was fined 6 million roubles (445 euros) on 8 October for an article for German public radio *Deutsche Welle's* website.

*Belsat TV* contributors **Maryna Malshanava** and **Alyksandr Dzianisau** were also fined in September and April, respectively. No fewer than six other journalists have received warnings this year for working without accreditation.

On 23 October, the government formally [rejected](#) an [appeal](#) filed in September by the [Belarus Association of Journalists \(BAJ\)](#), a Reporters Without Borders partner, calling on it to stop persecuting independent journalists and to bring the country's media laws into line with the international treaties ratified by Belarus.

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### 26.09.2014 - Authorities step up harassment of independent journalists

#### The persecution is above all targeting journalists working for media based abroad

In a continuing drive to suppress independent news coverage, the authorities are stepping up the penalties imposed on journalists who work for foreign media, often using their inability to obtain the obligatory government press accreditation as a pretext.

In the latest case, a judge in Babruysk, in the eastern region of Mogilev, imposed a fine of 357 euros yesterday on **Marina Malchanava** for a report about an NGO that supports children with cancer. It was broadcast by *Belsat TV*, a station based in Poland that criticizes the Belarusian government.

Three other journalists – **Ales Dzianisau**, **Andrey Myaleshka** and **Ales Zaleuski** - were fined for working for *Belsat TV* without accreditation, while **Viktar Parfyonenka**, who works for *Radio Racyja*, another station based in Poland, was denied accreditation for the seventh time on 24

September.

On 16 September, police raided the apartments of **Ales Burakou** and his parents in Mogilev on the grounds that he had sent reports to German public broadcaster *Deutsche Welle* without the necessary accreditation.

The police took Burakou's laptop and USB flash drives, and two desktop computer towers belonging to his father. Seven policemen carried out the search of Burakov's home, which was filmed.

He has filed complaints with the foreign ministry, the public prosecutor's office and the Mogilev executive committee requesting prosecution of those responsible for the unjustified police raids and assurances that the material acquired by the police during the raids will not be used to bring further charges against him.

All these journalists have been charged with "illegally creating and disseminating media products" under article 22.9 of the code of administrative offences, which does not apply to working without accreditation,

As the Belarus Association of Journalists [says](#), "*the Belarusian authorities are misusing article 22.9 when they equate working without accreditation with the illegal creation and dissemination of information.*"

During a 15-17 September visit to Belarus, Dunja Mijatovic, the OSCE representative on freedom of the media, [called](#) on the authorities to abolish obligatory accreditation for journalists in order to [improve media freedom](#).

*"As well as systematically stifling the few remaining critical media, the government has launched an offensive against foreign media and against journalists who are forced to work for foreign media without accreditation because they cannot get it,"* said Reporters Without Borders assistant research director Virginie Dangles.

*"The regime's strategy is clear - to create the conditions under which independent journalism disappears of its own accord,"* Dangles added.

The authorities are also directly targeting media based abroad, such as *Belsat TV*. A lawsuit against *Belsat TV*, a station based in Poland that broadcasts to Belarus, was heard by a court on 4 September. Brought by BELSATplus, a company that sells TV cable and other TV broadcast equipment, it accused *Belsat TV* of using an existing company name. The court dismissed the case for lack of evidence.

Created in 2003 under the name of Hi-Tech Market, the company changed its name to BELSATplus in 2006, a month after *Belsat TV's* creation in Poland with the aim of providing independent news coverage of Belarus and the rest of Europe.

*Belsat TV's* attempts to register its Minsk bureau with the appropriate authorities have been repeatedly rejected.

Belarus is ranked 157th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

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